

Reaching out to Hispanic population a must for those in ministry

Mary Bosley began her job as a coordinator for religious education at St. Clement I in Lansdowne less than a month ago. With kindergartners through sixth graders under her guidance, she has to meet many families, many of whom come from Hispanic backgrounds.

That's one of the reasons why she attended "The Catechists Call to Nurture the Faith in a Multicultural Parish," at Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie Sept. 8. The conference was held for parish staff and catechists to give them a better understanding of the Hispanic cultures that are shaping the future of their parishes.

"I really wanted to get a grasp on this," Bosley said. "It's really an important part of our larger church."

The changes to the church are dramatic; as 56 percent of American Catholics less than 10 years old are Latino and 48 percent of American Catholics between 10 to 19 are Latino as well. The goal of the conference was to heighten awareness about the Hispanic culture, shed light on educational factors involved in multicultural religious education and provide tools to effectively engage Hispanics through religious and catechetical formation.

Like Bosley, Jojo Nad is thinking about the present and future. The youth minister of St. Lawrence Martyr, Jessup, and Resurrection of Our Lord in Laurel found many subjects that sharpened his ministry tools Sept. 8. He said Resurrection has a significant Hispanic population while St. Lawrence appears poised for growth as well.

"There's no denying we are in the age of removing boundaries," Nad said. "We're opening doors. This is important."

During the daylong session, led by School Sister of Notre Dame Linda Stilling,

coordinator of the Institute of Pastoral Spanish at Notre Dame of Maryland University, the estimated 20-plus attendees brought varying degrees of experience.

“The reality that many parish staffs are facing and are being confronted with, particularly with the Hispanic community, can be challenging, daunting, exciting and even a bit perplexing,” said Armando Garcia, coordinator of Hispanic Pastoral Formation for the archdiocese and the organizer of the Holy Trinity event. “There’s a need to cross cultural and language barriers. What we want to build upon is what’s common to all of us - that we’re one family.”

Sister Linda said that a catechist offering relational ministry to parents can accomplish great things.

“You want to meet the families and greet them,” she said. “I can’t tell what that means. It may not be a big deal to you. To them, it means the world.”

As Garcia said his staff plan more catechetical lesson days, Bosley said she would tell others in ministry about the benefits of attending.

“When you’re doing this in the first couple of months, you’re going to need all the help you can get,” Bosley said. “I am the voice for my kids. They can’t advocate for themselves. My job is to learn how to best advocate for them. I can’t if I don’t understand what their needs are. This event gives me the language and the knowledge to understand.”